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C.M. 01 Turner, Adm.

Verification Fears

Signing a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty with the Soviets is vitally important to the future peace of the world. It will commit the two superpowers to reason and restraint in piling up the weapons that could blow us all up.

But the SALT agreement is not going to solve all the problems. Nor will it instantly persuade Americans that the Soviets are good guys who will scrupulously observe each and every provision of the treaty. For that reason it is vitally important, and the treaty itself recognizes this, that we be able to check up on them (and them on us). This problem of "verification" is more of an issue in the U.S., probably, than in Russia because we are an open society and they are not. Neither side trusts the other; both make full use of "spy-in-the-sky" satellites and other surveillance techniques. But Russian intelligence agents can often obtain important and sometimes secret information by reading our newspapers and magazines. You can safely bet that situation doesn't obtain in Russia.

The takeover of Iran recently by a religious fanatic and his lawless revolutionary kangaroo courts and execution squads complicates the SALT treaty's chances. That treaty must be ratified by the U.S. Senate. And the thing that worries many senators more than anything else is precisely this question of verification. How do we know the Russians will keep their part of the bargain? We had two important monitoring facilities in Iran, sophisticated electronic listening posts that were key elements in our intelligence gathering system. Now they are gone. How badly does this fact damage our ability to keep tabs on the Russians?

Before Iran went the way of the Ayatollah, President Carter was saying that a SALT agreement was practically ready for his and Brezhnev's signatures. The chances

looked pretty fair that the Senate would go along. But now the opposition in the Senate has a new lease on life. And anti-SALT senators strengthened their hands even more when CIA chief, Admiral Stansfield Turner, testified at a briefing that it would take five years for us to make up what we lost in those Iran listening stations. One critic, Sen. Jake Garn, R-Utah, saw the situation as desperate: "There is nothing the United States can do," he said, "in either the near or long term to compensate for the loss of electronic listening posts in Iran, making verification of a new SALT treaty an impossible task."

The administration immediately sent in Defense Secretary Harold Brown to see if he could calm the fears of Sen. Garn and those who think as he does. Brown said it would take us about a year to regain the verification ability we had lost, and added that the Russians didn't have the means to set up in that time a system in violation. "It is my judgment," he said, "that our monitoring will be such as to provide adequate verification as to Soviet compliance with the curbs on new or modified ICBMs."

And State Department spokesman Thomas Reston added further reassurance: "Nothing Admiral Turner said contravenes the basic judgment of this administration that the terms of the treaty will be adequately verifiable. The president would not sign an agreement unless he was firmly convinced that it is adequately verifiable."

Except for crossing T's and dotting I's, the administration has said, the long and tortuous negotiations with the Soviets are about to come to a successful conclusion. But one last big hurdle remains—the U.S. Senate and its vote on ratification. And that hurdle looks a lot bigger today than it did a few weeks ago.